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III. INDIFFERENCE OF THE CHURCH TO CHILD LABOR REFORM

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I have no doubt it is a matter of no little surprise to a great many pious and well-intentioned people to find the Church named among the forces described as antagonistic to child labor reform. But to those who know something of the miseries involved in the labor of little boys and little girls, who understand something of the amount of work to be done before our country can be relieved from the unspeakable disgrace of child slavery, who see the public opinion that must be educated, inspired, and directed before this work can even partially be accomplished, who see what such a rich and powerful institution as the Church might do in the education and inspiration and direction of this public opinion, and who see this same Church as a whole now standing indifferent and complacent before the miserable problem, to such, I say, it is a matter of surprise not that the Church is indicted here upon this program as an enemy of social change, but that this indictment has been so long delayed. For when has the Church as a body ever really been the champion of any great movement for social, industrial, or political emancipation, and when have the prophets of such movements ever found in the typical church anything but averted faces and indifferent hearts?

To go no further back into the history of Christian civilization than sixty years ago, and to wander no farther afield than our own country, look at the attitude taken by the churches of America, with a few glorious exceptions, toward the greatest social crusade of the nineteenth century—the anti-slavery movement of Garrison, Whittier, and John Brown. Not merely was the Church, as a body, indifferent to the abolitionists, but again and again it was openly hostile; not merely did the Church refuse to attack the institution of slavery, but it actually defended it, and like the devil, to whom it professed to be opposed, quoted Scripture in its behalf; and when the battle had been fought and the victory achieved, and the

laurel crowns of triumph distributed to those who had endured the dust and fury of the combat, those crowns rested upon the brows only of those whom the Church had driven from her sanctuary.

Or take the great fight for tenement-house reform in the early nineties in New York City. When that heroic band of crusaders, under the leadership of men like Jacob A. Riis and Richard Watson Gilder, entered upon their campaign for the relief of the dwellers in the hideous tenements upon the East Side, fighting for sunlight, fresh air, pure water, and decent sanitation—conditions of living at least as good as those provided by the ordinary man for his horses and his dogs—these men not only found themselves confronted by an almost solid phalanx of indifferent churches, but in the very front rank they encountered the richest Protestant church in America, which was so zealous to serve the needs of men, that it fought the newly enacted tenement-house laws to the highest court in New York state.

Or, again, take the great trades-union movement of the last twenty or thirty years. I count this movement for the organization and uplift of American labor as the finest exemplification on the one hand of the political spirit of democracy, and on the other hand, of the religious spirit of brotherhood, that our country has seen during the past two generations; and yet the weak and stumbling laboring man, at enormous sacrifice, has fought his battle for industrial freedom all alone, and the Church of God as an organization has not so much as lifted a little finger in his behalf. Yet the Church has the impudence to complain that the laboring man to-day does not worship within its portals! The truth of the matter is, the Church, with such glorious exceptions as are familiar to us all, has never been the champion of social reform, has never been the leader of social progress. Seeing evil, it has declined to interfere; looking upon iniquity, it has refused to smite; gazing full upon industrial oppression, it has refrained from opposition; finding men, apparently respectable, guilty of "all manner of extortion and excess", it has spoken no rebuke. And all the while the Church, thus recreant to its real task of establishing upon the earth the Kingdom of God, has soothed its conscience by building splendid cathedrals, reciting long prayers, singing loud hymns of adoration, preaching pious sermons, remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and smiting the traditional sins of drunkenness, adultery,

and atheism; to-day, as yesterday, careful about "the mint, the anise, and the cummin", and neglectful of the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and goodwill among men! Says Prof. Walter Rauschenbusch, in his epoch-making book, *The Church and the Social Crisis*, speaking with the authority of an exact and thorough knowledge of ecclesiastical history: "The essential purpose of Christianity was to transform human society into the Kingdom of God by regenerating all human relations and reconstituting them in accordance with the will of God." "But", he continues, "the Church has never yet undertaken to carry out this fundamental purpose of its existence."

This being the attitude in the past toward nearly all great movements for the transformation of human society, why should we be surprised to find that the Church, as a whole, to-day is maintaining this same attitude toward child labor reform, one of the latest of our modern specialized crusades for social justice? Those familiar only with the life of Jesus might well expect something wholly different from the Church, perhaps, in this particular case. Remembering how Jesus gathered the little children in his arms and blessed them, how he declared that it was not the will of God that even one of these little ones should perish, and how he proclaimed that whosoever offended one of these little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea, they might well imagine that the Church, which acclaims this Nazarene as Lord and Master, would, in this case, if in no other, hear the call for deliverance and give answer in no uncertain tones. But those who are familiar, as Professor Rauschenbusch is familiar, with the Church's "failure" to fulfill its essential purpose of transforming society into the Kingdom of God, are not surprised to find that the Church, in this case, as in nearly every other, has been all too faithless to its appointed task. In its indifference to the child labor movement, the Church is doing nothing more nor less than living up to its own record. It is consistent, that is all! To say this is not to criticize the Church unjustly. I am myself a clergyman, and would not, for very shame, wantonly assail that institution which I am sworn to serve. But if, in very virtue of my office, I am under obligation not to be unjust, I would remind you that I am under equal obligation to be just, and justice forces the confession that the Church has been very largely recreant to its trust, and never more recreant than in its indifference to child labor reform.

That I am standing here to-night, speaking upon this subject assigned me by the Child Labor Committee, is in itself sufficient evidence of the fact of the Church's indifference. The reasons for this indifference are, perhaps, not so evident. Why is it, you naturally enough ask, that the Church does not arouse itself and enter into this fight for the emancipation of children from grinding toil as though it meant business? Why is the Church, as a whole, to-day standing oblivious, while "wrong rules the land and waiting justice sleeps"? What is the reason for the Church's indifference to social needs? To answer this question adequately would be to write the history of ecclesiastical Christianity from the fourth century A. D. down even to the present moment. It would mean such an elaborate study of Christian history as Professor Rauschenbusch has given in that famous fourth chapter of his *The Church and the Social Crisis*, which he entitles "Why Has Christianity Never Undertaken the Work of Social Reconstruction". But in lieu of this, it is only possible to make certain sweeping generalizations, which do not by any means apply to all individual churches or all individual ministers, but which may not unjustly be said to apply to the typical church and the typical minister. It is of these only that I speak, leaving you to note such exceptions to my statements as any even casual knowledge of modern church tendencies makes perfectly evident.

Denominationalism

First of all I would name the evil of denominationalism. Here in the world of Christendom to-day do we see hundreds of differing sects, each concerned not with the worship of God or the service of man, but with the establishment of its own private and patented and copyrighted interpretation of Christian doctrine. Church is arrayed against church, minister against minister, in no more serious difference than the translation of a Bible text, or the hair-splitting quibble of a theological distinction. While the Church is thus devoting its energies to the solution of these purely sectarian problems, society is abandoned to its own devices, and social iniquity left to flourish undisturbed. That society should fall into the hands of Methodists or Unitarians or Christian Scientists has aroused the Church to a crusade of opposition; but that society should fall into the hands of grafters, money-mad capi-

talists, and war-crazed statesmen, is contemplated by the Church with comparative indifference. It smites the church of a different sect across the street, but forgets the gambling den around the corner. It assails the heretical minister downtown, but only now and then speaks a word against the employer of little children and under-paid women. Even when the churches are not assailing one another, but are living together in more or less peace and harmony, as is to-day more and more coming to be the case, they are still paralyzed as social forces by reason of absorption in their own petty sectarian affairs. The Unitarian churches are busy not in serving society, but in organizing new Unitarian churches. The Presbyterian churches are interested not in providing for the social welfare of the American people, but in furthering the prosperity of their Presbyterian missionary organizations. Each church is so absorbed in keeping its own denominational machinery going and in solving its own denominational problems, that it has no time and strength to give to the machinery of society or to the solving of the vexing problems of modern social life.

The churches are indifferent to such a public reform as the child labor movement because they are so vitally concerned with the private work of their own sectarian propaganda, and I venture to assert that the churches will never be aroused to their duty in this matter until all denominational barriers have been torn down, all denominational titles wiped away, and all churches have joined in one great army of the living God!

Other Worldliness

As a second reason for the Church's indifference to child labor reform, I would name the "other-world" conception of religion, which has led the Church astray for centuries. To-day, as for so many generations, the Church is laying the emphasis of its teaching upon the life beyond the grave, and is thus neglecting the life upon this side of the grave. The Church presents itself to men as a means of salvation from the temptations and sins of this world, and, therefore, of safe entrance into the joys of the future world. The Church is busy urging men to turn their thoughts away from the problems of this purely transient life and give themselves up to preparation for that eternal life which is to come. And this being the traditional attitude of the Church toward this present world, it

is easy to understand why it does not greatly concern itself with the regeneration of existing society. Other organizations may concern themselves with cleaning the streets of our cities, but the Church must think only of the golden streets of the New Jerusalem! Other organizations may be interested in providing short hours and adequate wages and decent conditions of labor for the men and women who toil in our factories and shops, but the Church must think only of the souls of these men and women in the next world, regardless of what happens to their bodies in this present world! Other societies may devote themselves to the emancipation of little boys and little girls from exhausting labor, but the Church is interested only in bringing these children to Christ—whatsoever that may mean! Again, I venture to assert, that the Church will never be aroused to a real interest in the child labor reform or any other great social movement, until it has forgotten all about what may lie beyond the grave, and has turned its exclusive attention to what can be seen and experienced upon this side the grave!

Religion for Export

As a third reason for the Church's indifference to child labor reform, I would name that which is closely analogous to that of which we have just been speaking; namely, the interest of the great body of Christian churches in what are known as foreign missions. Let me state with all possible emphasis that, although a clergyman of a church which has never been greatly interested in the work of foreign missions, I am not at all opposed to these activities in themselves. What I am opposed to is the support of foreign missions to the neglect of home missions. It is all well and good enough to export religion, providing that you have a surplus after your own crying needs have been satisfied, but when I look at the political and social and industrial conditions of our own country, when I behold such a picture as that presented by the recent Pittsburg Survey, when I think of the toil-worn men and underpaid women who are destroyed little by little by our remorseless industrial machinery, when I think of the hundreds of thousands of little children toiling in factories and mines, that their greedy employers may fatten upon the blood-money which they create, I would venture to assert in all humility that the American people at the present time have no religion for purposes of export.

I can think of nothing more impudent than for the Christian churches of this country to bring to foreign lands that gospel of Jesus Christ which they have not learned themselves, and to the practice of which they have not as yet converted their own civilization. It is all right to attempt to Christianize a pagan land, provided that this pagan land of America is Christianized; and I believe, therefore, that it would be better for the churches if they turned their gaze full upon their own communities. And yet to-day, as yesterday, there is no easier way to arouse the enthusiasm of the churches than to inaugurate a foreign mission campaign, and nothing harder to accomplish than to interest the churches in a campaign for the redemption of our own society. A year or so ago there was established in New York City what was called the Ethical-Social League of New York City, the purpose of this organization being to unite the churches of the city with the various secular agencies working for social reform in a general campaign for the social redemption of this great American metropolis. This League has taken up, one by one, such questions as unemployment, tenement-house reform, child labor, and, in spite of able leadership, it has succeeded in accomplishing almost nothing. The League is to-day sick unto death, and this for the reason, as the director has told me personally, that it has been impossible to arouse the interest of the churches in these problems. And yet, at this very moment, the so-called "Laymen's Missionary League" is holding a great series of revival services in New York, and every orthodox church in the city is aroused to a very fever of devoted enthusiasm. Enthusiastic over cleaning up the wilderness of Africa, but indifferent to cleaning up the wilderness of the East Side! Enthusiastic over saving the downtrodden women of India and China and Japan, but indifferent to the thousands of downtrodden women in America! Enthusiastic over "saving the little ones" in distant lands, but indifferent to the hundred of thousands of little ones annually perishing in our own! I tell you, my friends, charity begins at home! Religion begins at our own door. True Christianity means keeping your own back yard clean and putting ashes on your own sidewalk. If ever the Church is to do the work it ought to do for child labor reform, or any other social movement, it must first be taught to establish the Kingdom of God in its own community, before it attempts to establish this kingdom in countries far away across the seas!

Call Nothing Common or Unclean

As a fourth reason for the indifference of the Church to child labor reform, let me speak of that astonishing idea which has persuaded the Church in all ages to assert that religion, as such, has nothing to do with political or industrial questions of any kind. This idea has its root in that fallacious distinction which has always been made between sacred and secular, and which has consigned to the care of the Church the one, and frankly removed from its control, or even interest, the other. The Church, it is argued, has to do with spiritual, not worldly, matters. It has its sacred book—all others are profane. It has its holy day—all others are common. It has its one specific field of sacred work—all others are secular. Assiduously preserving the Sabbath from profanation by innocent amusements or open art galleries and libraries, it is careless of the profanation of other days in the week by criminal political bargains and scandalous business deals; tireless in lifting its voice in denunciation of agnosticism or failure to attend divine services or indifference to the creed and the sacraments, it is silent about underpaid women; silent about the monopolizing of the necessities of life; silent about the private ownership of public resources; silent about the working of children to death in factories and mines! What spectacle could be more pitiful than this? If it is not the business of the Church to concern itself with all the ills from which human society is suffering, then it has no business to transact. If it is not the duty of the Church to fight the good fight for mercy, justice and good faith in the world of everyday affairs, then it has no duty to discharge. If it is not the task of the Church to redeem little children from helpless toil, then it has no task of redemption to fulfill. Never, I believe, will the churches be aroused to a true sense of their duty in regard to child labor, or any other social reform, until they are made to see in a far truer sense than has ever yet been understood that their field is the world—the world of toiling, suffering, downtrodden, oppressed men and women and children.

Tyranny of the Pew

And as a final reason for the Church's indifference to the child labor movement, I venture to offer this, that the men who are most largely responsible for the labor of children, the men who employ these children and grow rich from the wealth these children

create, these men are many of them sitting in the front pews of the churches, occupying offices in parish committees, and paying the salaries of the ministers. It is easy for the minister to denounce the saloonkeeper and hold him responsible for drunkenness, for the reason that the saloonkeeper does not usually go to church; but it is not so easy to denounce the employer of child labor, when he is sitting right before you and listening to your words. It is easy for the minister to criticise the trade unionist and denounce him when he attacks the "scab", for the reason that the laboring man is not a contributing member of the church; but it is not so easy to criticise the Manufacturers' Association, which is doing its level best to crush the trade unionist into serfdom, when the members of that Association are heavy financial contributors to your religious society. It is easy for the minister to denounce the white-slave traffic, because the ordinary trafficker in this loathsome form of business never hears the words spoken in condemnation of his crime; but it is not so easy to denounce the man who pays girls in his stores an inadequate wage, and thus profits from a white-slave traffic of his own, when that man helps to pay your salary. The typical church to-day, especially in our cities, is a class institution, and the men and women responsible for the peculiar political and industrial evils which are afflicting our country, and who are profiting by these evils, are the very ones who compose that class which is to-day inside the church. The members of the church to-day have no intention of supporting pulpits which shall be engaged in exposing the "new varieties of sin", of which these members, wittingly or unwittingly, are guilty; in attacking the industrial practices from which these members draw their fortunes; or in assailing that social system of which these members are the beneficiaries. Hence the Church is paralyzed, and in the great battle of industrial democracy, the distinctive battle of our time, the Church is the champion not of the downtrodden many, but of the dominant and selfish few.

Here, now, are some of the reasons why the Church, as a whole, is so indifferent to the child labor and other social reform movements of our day. Deceived by false theologies, ensnared by artificial and remote issues, captured by material ambition and worldly pride, made the instrument first of a corrupt and selfish priesthood, and now of a corrupt and selfish social class, ministered unto and not ministering, how far has the Church been led from the simple purpose of Jesus, which was to bring in the Kingdom of God, the

brotherhood of man, the reign of peace and goodwill, upon the earth! How great is the need that a new class of prophets shall arise to restore the Church to its appointed task "of reconstituting all human relations in accordance with the will of God"!

We need to-day a new reformation, which shall rouse the Church again from slothful ease and corrupt content, and awaken it to the crying needs of men. We need to-day another Martin Luther, who shall interpret the Christian gospel in our day in terms of society, as Luther interpreted it in his day in terms of the individual. We need a new baptism of the spirit, that God's Kingdom may at last come, and God's will at last be done on earth. It is for this new reformation I am looking—it is for the words of this new prophet I am listening—it is for this new baptism of the spirit I am waiting. I, for one, believe this new age is at last at hand. Everywhere are the ministers of all confessions arousing to a sense of their social responsibilities—everywhere are churches of all denominations awakening to a consciousness of their duty to the life that now is. Brave words are being spoken in many pulpits, efficient work is being done by many ecclesiastical organizations. In no direction perhaps is the change in the attitude of the churches so remarkable as in the direction of child labor reform, where the ignorance and indifference of a decade ago are slowly changing into an active and united crusade against iniquity. Much work must still be done. Many ministers must suffer martyrdom—many churches must undergo dissension. But the new reformation is here, and the Church slowly but surely must give itself to the redemption of humanity, else must it wholly perish. "If I thought," said Theodore Parker, at the opening of his immortal Boston ministry, "the Church were to do nothing for social redemption, then would I never enter her portals but once again, and then to bow my shoulders to their manliest work—to heave down its strong pillars, arch and dome and roof and wall, steeple and tower, though like Samson, I buried myself under the ruins of that temple which profaned the worship of God most high. I would do this in the name of man; in the name of Christ, I would do it; yes, in the dear and blessed name of God." Unless the signs of the times wholly deceive us, such an assault upon an apostate Church need never come. For the Church, after long centuries of "failure" will yet hear the cry of outraged humanity, and do the work it was appointed to do for the Kingdom of Almighty God.